

Tangelo

A Poem
and
Some Thoughts on Collaboration

Patrick Durgin and Jen Hofer

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A Poem

Tried and tried
again we

filtered some feline
delicacy unspecifically

Semezdin Mehmedinović wrote that "a cat is, literally, a political animal." What is the difference between a filter and a screen—one is cinematic but not another? between breeding (to serve some juridical desire, some aesthetic criteria) and appreciation—one is a matter of husbandry and the other a fine art? Cats can't abandon their humans. They are not connotative, and there are no expectations. I have always had one, and again I do.

Abandoned by someone
for someone

else. Having shown
up or

us up, at
the door.

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There is a poem by Robert Creeley, by that name, "The Door," for Robert Duncan. It's not as memorable to me as having discussed it and him, Duncan, with him, Creeley, in one of those haunted Buffalo winters, haunted because the city is being bored hollow with every passing year, and Bob, as everyone called him, was getting on in them. And yet winter continues to come and plants itself like a fact, completely unfulfilling. And then a friend wrote one about me in my room with one door and one window and tried to muster a vast architecture with hyperbolic ellipses. (To say what it was "about" is trite; I was a character set in my room I had stepped into, in the poem.) Creeley writes, "Am I allowed to bow myself down / in the ridiculous posture of renewal, / of the insistence of which I am the virtue?"

Blankly we refuse
to cease

beginning again notwithstanding
being obliterated

by what's there
to obliterate

us or it
depending. Depending.

The "blank" in Stein, unlike that in Mallarmé for instance, was a necessary, temporary construct, through which the matter of "balance" and variance presented itself to her as the opportunity to fulfill a distinctly American (and by extension, via Picasso's cubist evocations, Spanish) promise. In "Poetry and Grammar" she writes that "An American can fill up a space in having his movement of time by adding unexpectedly anything and yet getting within the included space everything he had intended getting." Yet, of course, everything depends on "how it is seen." That which is not there to be "seen"--not in an ocular sense, but as local presence, minimally radiating, interdependent--will withstand whatever refusals and virtues fill it up, by virtue of having hid from that singular sense; there are no exceptions.

Vertov rode a car or two of the agit-train with cameras, film, a mobile processing lab and a projector. He would confer with villagers about what they wanted to film, shoot the reels, process them, and project them that same night, in the village. Does America lack a true tradition of radical agitation, as Lipset argues? Or is exceptionalism itself our radicalism, however polluted with imperious and patronizing denigrations of all that we are the exception to? Is "the personal is political" our contemporary (or contemporary-ish) exceptionalism, as we model green and local purchasing habits for those who don't even have a decent supermarket within a walkable radius?

Speaking of writing
that "yokes together, often
violently, the social
and the body...

As a strategy
for de-idealizing
the human subject
while still retaining

A human focus,"
Tyrone Williams cites Snow
Sensitive Skin, the collaborative
book by Taylor Brady and Rob Halpern,

Saying in it coexist
"culpability,"
"impotence,"
and rage.

Or expressions of each as indivisible
from one another, if I follow him.
Maybe it is a valid question--What of expression?
--thus a query from which there is no exception.

Right. As Taylor and Rob suggest, "the dispatched centers
singers / organize listeners as suppliers / etch à
border on terrain we'd thought / from the abstract peaks
obscure / light had to have gone out of time / for time:
to be this bright now / let's go on: descending / into
recon by fire /// *---there being no other line of inquiry*
whether that line plumbs for fire, reasoning or
communication. Does our recon tell us where to bomb, or
where not to? Tyrone cites Derrida semi-extensively in
his book On Spec, which I recently taught to my students
who said they "didn't get it" and proceeded to construct
imaginative arguments from it with great and halting
elegance. "Tout autre est tout autre," Tyrone says
Derrida says, wedge and ligament.

Paulo Henriques Britto
read in Chicago recently
and I listened as he read
his own translations--*tout autre*

--and I hear him say, or so I recall,
"an assembled bird in error"
and I built it into a poem
of "mine."

I had been worrying the distinctions
and implications between imitation,
immodesty, sobriety, and homage when
I heard this and realized worrying is not thinking.

It is a paradise
of private
confusions;
"to share a tangelo / is not to eat a peach."

As it is, worry bedraggles most
days, neither tangelo nor peach, a utopia
of satsuma, persimmon, cukes. The films
or perhaps more accurately film interruptions
of Austrian artist Martin Arnold, screened
last night in downtown Los Angeles at REDCAT
--according to Peter Kubelka, "the perfectionist
of the film medium," one of the three top spaces
in the world for seeing film, and though I am not
a perfectionist of any medium save, perhaps, the medium
of nagging self-doubt, I must agree

about REDCAT--reduce gesture, expression
and speech down to their most basic elements, exposing
all utterance, all bodies, all relations
as in some deep molecular way
grotesque. Or beautiful and weird.
Is there a difference? Twitchy, magnetized, exposed.

The hand jolts. The face wrenches.
The kiss attacks. The door torques
our bodies already torqued.

Tried and tried
again. Tried.
And tried again.
"The concepts

of transformation
and identity
are always inseparable;
it is

the possibility of arranging them
with respect to each
other which is
the excitement of reason."--Brice Marden, 1973

Some Thoughts on Collaboration

Collaboration is an invitation to interrupt our previously programmed modes. Generative, compelling, propulsive, welcome and uncomfortable discomforts galvanize, unsettle, resituate.

For a long time I enjoyed the promise that collaborative compositional modes seem to entail, but it ultimately, or at present, registers, in the baldness of its generality, as a pellucid deferment of deliberation. And I enjoyed articulating that promise in the most generalized means, meaning it's come to this; joy has made the mighty sufferance of any lived instance of community--the watchword of "collaboration"--impertinent where its initial situation was never fixed, and probably never a given.

As for givens, which are present like it or not and only sometimes mutable, it seems to me that for the writer, collaboration can encourage their unfixing, in that (at the very least though not inherently) it exposes the fissures and foundations of our own practical habits. The need to explain, while frustrating, might aid in self-knowledge, and in relation, and perhaps also in the articulation of a poetics, which I suspect is part of what counters "the baldness of its generality." Must collaboration always generalize, always defer deliberation?

That may be the first virtue of collaborative modes, that most of them, I'd guess, temporarily displace the act of writing from any objectives predetermining it. But the promise shouldn't be confused with the fulfillment that made it seem inevitable, despite if it ever was.

For whom does writing constitute fulfillment? To whom does writing—what writing?—seem inevitable? And least of all the writer her or himself, I'd imagine—or even posit, being one, despite if I ever really believed in it. And then there are moments when I do, some shared with others in spaces constructed as collaborative, and if I'm not certain then I am at least compelled, and certainly grateful, which counts for something, though what, beyond a minimally radiating galvanizing force, I'm not certain at all.

Collaboration denotes a voluntary (active) relinquishment of deliberation (constructed as), which, in its best instance, connotes a permeability inherent to language. Voiced—say, at a poetry reading, because it'd make sense that the voice you are listening to could say anything—you disrespect connotative values, because you know that everything you hear is intentional, deliberate, partial to "any" utterance; the "voice" so many claim to find on the page is a crudely chance encounter. In page-bound discourse, you can't trust intent precisely because only certain things make sense to say.

Or it makes no sense (new sense) to say things this way, which is why we need these modes of saying? Being deliberate may be relinquished or wrested, but I'm not convinced deliberating can, though the boundaries that delimit it may slide; collaboration allows the deliberation inherent to any practice of articulation to be bound by the limits of someone else's imagination rather than by the limits of our own knowledge, alongside those at a parallel gallop. A parallel gap?

Gaping at some minimal index of the universe, being mindful means the image fails to belong—to whomever. Can there be, then, a failure of imagination? A failure to collaborate? You would have had to been Frank O'Hara to write "I don't know whose blood's in me," regardless of the heroic disavowal of such a line.

Is then "all writing collaboration" in the way "all writing is translation," according to Pierre Joris and Jerome Rothenberg (and myself), not to mention many others? And in exactly that way, where it both is and isn't? Perhaps part of my difficulty with poetry lately is that it seems so few of us "don't know whose blood's in us," or even think to ask. Or perhaps it's the bloodiness of nearly everything that gets to me, and that some of us have the privilege to choose not to worry about it. I get bored by my own lapel-shaking, yet can't shake the impulse.

It is easy to celebrate and protest the endangered integrity of the voice, the body, the body politic, but that ease is as vapid as echoes or spinning mirrors. If imitation was never possible in the classical sense of the term, what is mimicry? Boredom, in fact.

What Berryman referred to as "lack of inner resources" (followed by "and I am heavy bored," if I remember correctly). It seems there is only nominal integrity to bodies, politic and otherwise, which is perhaps why naming (ekphrasis of the world?) weighs so heavily. There is a potential and actual buoyancy to collaboration—or it is a buoy, really—which is the antithesis of boredom.

It is not just goading—being seduced by what's heard when listening, as an ensemble player, or the forced forgetting in games of exquisite corpse—because goading can and most often is a bore, a dissolute sort of seduction. The antithesis of boredom is hypothesis? There must be the negative as the displaced center of any collaborative writing, so as to save the figure of this hypothesis from drab teleology and smug positivism. Cherishing one's own misery is no cultivation of one's "resources." It reminds me of something Propertius says in Kathy Acker's Birth of the Poet: "I don't want to make any decisions. People tell me what to do very easily and I won't stand being told what to do, so I avoid people."

Tangelo was written collaboratively over e-mail by Patrick Durgin and Jen Hofer during November and December, 2008. In January, 2009 Jen typed this small book on her grandmother's Olivetti Letters 22 and bound it by hand at the kitchen table of 2905 Elm Street in Cypress Park, Los Angeles. This book is a gift.

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